



Monday, March 29, 2021

Governor Charlie Baker
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon St., Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Farmland Action Plan in FY2022 Capital Budget

Dear Governor Baker:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer these comments in support of a commitment of \$300,000 in the 2022 Capital Budget to develop a state Farmland Action Plan.

As the Commonwealth continues to acquire and hold farmland, the need for a comprehensive plan for those acquisitions and the use of those properties becomes more pressing. The MA Local Food Action Plan calls for the development of a formal statewide Farmland Action Plan to compile data on land use trends and use that data to guide state investments and policies related to farmland access, protection, and use.

This legislation to begin such a process has been proposed several times, and while there have been other land conservation and rural planning efforts that have touched on farmland, those processes have not been as comprehensive as proposed in the Food Plan. We feel that the approach proposed by the Plan – with its specific call for an inclusive engagement process, thorough analysis, policy recommendations, and establishment of benchmarks – is the most appropriate strategy to address the issues around this vital asset.

As evidenced by the 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture, which showed Massachusetts losing nearly 32,000 acres of farmland or 6% of our total acreage since 2012, the need for this type of inventory and planning is particularly critical at this time. Programs like Agricultural Preservation Restrictions and 61A have helped to stem some of the loss of farmland to development in Massachusetts, but additional efforts are clearly needed if we are to reverse this trend. By embarking on this process to understand existing conditions and develop plans and priorities for further policies and investments, the state will be taking a significant step toward protecting and even increasing land in active agricultural production.

We estimate that the cost of this project would be approximately \$300,000, and we urge the legislature to allocate such funding to support this process. We note that the 2018 environmental bond specifically mentions such a plan as an allowable use of capital funds (line 2511-0122), an indication that there is broad support for such spending, as well as for the endeavor itself.

The Collaborative is a network of Massachusetts food system organizations, working to promote, monitor, and facilitate implementation of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. The Plan was developed for and accepted by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council, a 17-member entity comprising

state agency, legislative, and industry representatives, established by the Legislature and Governor to develop recommendations, including legislative and regulatory changes, to promote sustainability and equity in the Commonwealth's food system.

The Plan represents the views of thousands of residents and farms, as well as hundreds of organizations and businesses. It emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to food system policy, where issues of economic development, natural resources, equitable access to resources, and others are all taken into account when considering laws and regulations related to food.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Winton Pitcoff', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Winton Pitcoff
Director